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Secretary Challenges Hospitals to Fight Healthcare Associated Infections, Makes Available \$50 Million in Recovery Act Funding Available

At a speech before the AFSCME Nurses Conference Secretary Kathleen Sebelius today discussed two new HHS reports on the quality of health care in America and challenged hospitals to work to reduce health care associated infections. Published by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the annual 2008 National Healthcare Quality Report and 2008 National Healthcare Disparities Report indicate that patient safety measures have worsened and that a substantial number of Americans do not receive recommended care. Upon issuing the reports, Sebelius also announced the availability of \$50 million in Recovery Act resources to fight health care associated infections and improve patient safety.

“Today’s reports show why we can’t wait to enact comprehensive health reform,” said Sebelius. “The status quo is unsustainable and we cannot allow millions of Americans to continue to go without the care they need and deserve.”

The reports found:

- 40 % of recommended care is not received by patients.
- Only 40% of diabetic patients received three recommended diabetic preventive exams in the past year, and this rate has not improved over time.
- Only half of obese adults and children are given advice to exercise more and eat a healthy diet.
- Seven out of ten adults with mood, anxiety, or impulse disorders received inadequate treatment or no treatment at all.
- Disparities in health care persist. Minority patients receive disproportionately poor care

compared to Caucasian patients. At least 60 percent of quality measures have not improved for minorities compared to Caucasians in the past six years.

- One in seven hospitalized Medicare patients experience one or more adverse event.
- Patient safety measures have worsened by nearly 1% each year for the past 6 years.
- Central line associated blood stream infections (CLABSIs) strike hundreds of thousands of patients each year.

Patient safety has declined in part because of this rise in health care associated infections (HAI), infections that patients acquire during the course of their stay in a healthcare setting, such as a nursing home or a hospital. HAIs are among the top ten leading causes death in the United States, and drive up the cost of health care by up to \$20 billion per year.

Sebelius today announced that the Department of Health and Human Services plans to make \$50 million in grants funded by the American Recovery Act available for states to help fight healthcare-associated infections (HAI). HHS plans to make \$40 million available through competitive grants to eligible states to create or expand state-based HAI prevention and surveillance efforts, and strengthen the public health workforce trained to prevent HAIs. HHS is also allocating \$10 million in grants to states to improve the process and increase the frequency of inspections for ambulatory surgical centers.

“Healthcare-associated infections can make illnesses worse, further debilitate patients who are already struggling and sometimes lead to death,” said Sebelius. “Through the funding provided by the Recovery Act, we can help prevent these infections and improve the quality of care for all patients.”

Sebelius also called on hospitals across America to commit to reduce Central Line Associated Blood Stream Infections in Intensive Care Units by 75 percent over the next three years. Research indicates that these infections strike hundreds of thousands of surgical patients and the percentage of patients acquiring these infections has steadily increased over the past six years.

Sebelius challenged hospitals to make use of a proven patient-safety checklist that can significantly and dramatically reduce the rate of these life-threatening infections.

“Patients expect to get better in a healthcare facility, not worse” added Sebelius. “The Recovery Act money will help protect patient safety, but we need hospitals to do more. Today, I’m challenging hospitals to take basic steps to fight infections that are weakening our health care system and threatening patient safety.”

To read the reports issued today, visit: <http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/qdr08.htm> To read the checklist referenced by Secretary Sebelius, visit <http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/clicklist.htm>

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